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## Forever families

By MARCIA STEFFENS / Dowagiac Daily News  
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CASSOPOLIS - "This is the best thing I get to do, make new and happy families," Probate Judge Sue Dobrich said.

In her Cass County Family Court Tuesday afternoon, three new families were made on Michigan Adoption Day.

"Everybody should do it - it's great" is the viewpoint of Marty Willis of Sister Lakes of adoption. "There are more than enough kids out there who need families."

"I always knew I wanted to adopt," added his wife Michelle. Their son, Michael, whom they adopted first, is in kindergarten and wasn't able to attend the adoption celebration, but Megan enjoyed the cake and punch.

This is the fourth year Cass County has celebrated Adoption Day, but at each and every adoption, Dobrich insists on a cake decorated especially for the child.

"I made the county include them even in a tight budget," she said smiling at County Commissioner Johnnie Rodebush of Howard Township, who hasn't missed these celebrations.

Mark and Sherry of Elkhart, Ind. added a son to join their family, which includes a seven-year-old daughter.

"It took us 10 years to have our first one," Mark said. "The opportunity came us ..." and the rest became history Tuesday when Dobrich declared them Christopher's parents.

Kathy Yoder of Cassopolis, who worked with the family, answered Dobrich that they were "a family who would love him the rest of his life."

Dobrich also acknowledged the attorneys who also work for the best interest of the child, Dennis Tushla of Dowagiac and Greg Feldman of Niles. Tushla carries photos like they are his grandchildren, she added.

More than 65 adoptions have been finalized in Cass County alone, since last Adoption Day, which is always held Thanksgiving week, said Mary Rossman, representing the state. There were 2,800 adoptions and still are 4,500 children available. "It's a long way to go and there is an ongoing need for adoptive parents, a loving family and permanence," she added.

Adopting three of her foster children at once was simple, according to Polly Payne of Dowagiac, "just look at those faces," she added. "You fall in love with them."

She and her husband, Walter, have a 20-year-old son who is attending Southwestern Michigan College. The three adopted siblings are also joined by four other foster children.

"If you can take care of three ... my grandmother had 13 kids," Payne said. "You grow to love them. When you look in a child's face it's the closest you get to seeing God before you die."

Along with a healthy dose of love, she adds church and discipline. "Children need discipline or they won't grow up right ... productive ... to not live on society, but to help society," she added.

After having the three in her home for two years, adopting was "an easy decision."

She praised the people in the Cass County courts and the Department of Human Services (DHS). "They are wonderful, caring people who go the extra mile to take care of those children," she added.

"You couldn't ask for a better group of caring, understanding people: firm, fair, sweet and wonderful," she said.

Chris Kadulski, head of the DHS, also praised those like Payne, who "open their hearts and their home, day and night. They are saints.

"This is the best part. There is so much about abuse and neglect. This is the part where you see joy," he added.